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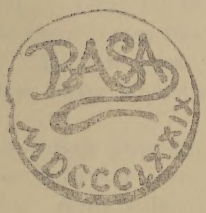
INFORMAL TALK GIVEN BY MRS T. S. PERRY TO THE BOSTON ART STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION IN THE LIFE CLASS ROOM AT THE MUSEUM FINE ARTS, WEDNESDAY, JAN. 24, 1894.



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INFORMAL TALK GIVEN BY MRS. T. S. PERRY TO THE BOSTON ART STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION IN THE LIFE CLASS ROOM AT THE MUSEUM FINE ARTS, WEDNESDAY, JAN. 20, 1894.

I HAVE been asked to say something to you of the things which Monet has said to me, and which may interest you. You know he is one of the most successful of the impressionists. According to a certain definition of impressionism, every artist is an impressionist. That is, every good artist expresses on canvas the impression that the object he is painting makes on him. But in some special sense, a certain style of color has come to be called by people "impressionism."

When you look at an object you see the local color, but you also see what is between you and the object, that is, the atmosphere. Atmosphere is what we see when we see the sky on a clear day. It might seem to you, therefore, that the color that is between us and everything would be pure blue. But the sky is light; it is reflected light. It is sky light that we get in our shadows. That is composed not merely of one color but of three colors. Even blue is not entirely blue. It is partly blue, partly yellow, partly pink. The thing that is most noticed in impressionist work is its shadows. People say they make purple shadows. But what color they really do consider shadow color is rather the reflected color of the sky. If you take a stick and set it up in the snow, that stick receives, in the first place, the

direct light of the sun on one side; then, where the snow is protected from the direct light of the sun we have what we call shadow, where there is no sun. The light is not wholly intercepted; for into that shadow, into that place where the direct light of the sun cannot fall on account of the stick, there falls a reflected light. On a bright day, when the sky is blue, the shadow of the stick, to almost anybody's eye, will be perfectly blue. Even an untrained eye can see that. But when the shadow falls on some object that has strong local color, like grass, or like a reddish road, it becomes more difficult for an untrained eye to see what it is. But if you use your brain, you see that it is the same color that falls on the snow.

Now there are many classes of "impressionists." Some men are so impressed by the envelope that they can see nothing but an envelope, almost no local color. In Pissaro's work there is very little color. I am going to show you a specimen in which there is very little local color; but I think it a beautiful picture. It is by Thomas Meteyard, and represents the front of a cathedral in sunlight. You see the sunlight falls here, and he has painted this as if it were white; but it is gray. He hardly sees the local color. You see he does perceive the red in the house, but still he has painted more the envelope than the object; that is a common form of modern impressionism. There are all degrees of variety, from that unto the people who have almost no atmosphere. Here is a copy of a Monet. It is not an original. I should not have dared to bring it over in my hands if it were. You see he represents the local color a little more than this man. You see those reddish rocks, a sort of iron formation, show more or less. I think it is very beautiful the way the red rocks show through the blue water. You feel the rock, and you feel it is hard.

Monet paints in pure color. I do not mean that the color does not often cross; he does not often make composite mixtures on his palette, but his colors are superposed and cross each other on his canvas. He showed me a canvas on which he has painted once. It had touches all over it made with a long hair brush. In the first place he has a faculty which we all wish we had. He can sit down with his nose to his canvas, and can see almost how his paintings are going to look. He will probably start in and give touches here and there, equally distributed all over the canvas. He says when you first come to a thing, your eye is more capable of receiving a fresh impression. He said to me once that he hardly ever sat down to paint a picture that he did not wish that he could be as *naïf* as if he had never seen it before, as if he had been blind, and his eyes had first opened on the object; that he should like to give the impression made upon his retina. That is what he means when he says he is an impressionist. He would like to give the impression without regard to his previous knowledge of the object, and represent its appearance in clear color. Color is merely the name we give to impressions made upon the retina. Color could not exist except for sight. He would like to sit down with a palette set with three or four colors. He uses some bright yellow, blue, green, and one or two different lakes and sometimes a little vermilion. He would like to sit down and reproduce that impression, as you might do worsted work or anything else of that kind. If one could reproduce absolutely and accurately all the patches of the color of the view before him, he would reproduce exactly the impression made upon his retina. But as we cannot be blind and start again, we must try to reduce ourselves to that receptivity each time we look at the object. Try not to think that

you know the grass is green, that the road is red, or white, or gray; ask yourself not what is the local color, but rather what does it now appear to me to be. Something, perhaps, quite different if I were in some different light.

People say that he paints rapidly. So he does. But he paints an enormous number of times, always under the same conditions of time of day, weather, etc. If he is painting on a day with particular brightness, he will not finish the picture unless he can get another day of the same brightness. We know that there is the veiled sunlight and the spotted sunlight, when the clouds are chasing across the sky, and I have known him to wait weeks with a picture that he was offered a large sum to finish, in order that he might get the right condition. Indeed, I have known him to leave some pictures entirely unfinished because trees had been cut down, or changes had been made, so that he was too conscientious to finish them. But I think some of these unfinished ones are as interesting as anything he has done.

He maintains that you must not paint one portion at a time, but must run over the whole picture; everything is relative, nothing can exist in color excepting as it is relative to every other color.

Monet never gives any lessons; he never takes any pupils. That he thinks is very bad. He thinks nobody should ever take a lesson.

Question. What kind of yellow does he like?

Answer. He tells me that he thinks there is not any good kind of yellow. He says that cadmium has been praised as the best; he thinks it is the worst. I think that almost any yellow that is painted absolutely pure can stand; but as we paint over it is very difficult. I wanted to paint a picture with the sunlight shining through some geraniums. I painted them almost every day. Then in

a few days they would turn brown again. At last I painted them with *outremer jaune*. Then I dragged over that around the edges a little *verte emeraude*, so that I got the little tinge of green which was all that was needed to represent leaves with sun shining through. There is one thing I wanted to say. The great difference between reflected light and sunlight is this: You get the yellow and pink rays in the sunlight almost entirely. In the shadow, you get the blue rays almost entirely. The three colors are present in everything; they are the colors which compose light; but the blue in the sunlight is present in such a small degree that it can be safely neglected. I am dogmatizing, but I am merely expressing my own opinion.

Question. Do you think that Monet always sees everything in this way?

Answer. I think that is what interests him. We all neglect something in our pictures.

Question. What lakes does he like?

Answer. *La que rose* and *la que foncie.* He takes a long-haired brush and then sweeps his color on with it. His hair brushes are made expressly for him. Sometimes he uses a long, round bristle brush. He makes all his paintings by combination of blue, red, yellow, and green.

Question. Does McKnight carry out the same principle in his paintings?

Answer. I think he does. But I think he does not enough realize the presence of the three colors. His color is not subtle enough. I mean to say that if he is painting an object he will sometimes express two that are strongest without expressing the third. Sometimes he will express only one. I do not think he envelops them enough, and is sometimes harsh.

Question. He paints in a different way from Monet?

Answer. Entirely. But I suppose they can be said to belong to the same school. I think that Monet has suffered from his copyists, who often paint very crudely.

Many people ask, "Why do you put pink into your grass?" I see it. I think I know why I see it. If any one whose eyes are sensitive looks at green for two minutes, and then looks away at a white wall, he will see pink. If you look at green grass for only five minutes, the impression of the green is so intense that your eye puts pink in to relieve itself wherever it can. That is, wherever there is an atom of earth to show through, the eye will relieve itself by coloring that bit of ground pink. It will be purplish pink, the pink with the darker tint of the ground showing through and making it more purple. You really do see the pink, even if you do not think you do. There must also be, somewhere, blue in grass, because the sky must be reflected upon it. You often see grass painted with chrome yellow and *verte veronèse*, and you say I never saw any such grass as that. But you have seen grass greener, because you have seen it with a complementary color supplied by your eye. When a thing is so green that it looks like a bit of green paper without softening touches of this complementary pink, it is not so vividly green, even in the impression it makes, as with these touches. It is not such a beautiful, harmonized impression of green as you get in nature seen through atmosphere. Even when the grass is so dense that the earth does not show through, you get the yellowish and reddish look of the stems. You do not know why it is that the grass does not make you so uncomfortable as these pictures do, but you feel the difference. If you look at the sky you can feel the vibration of light, something more than a mere color. There cannot be vibration without contrast. In a part near the horizon it is very often pink and yellow,

and blue mingled with vibrating touches of these other two colors seems bluer than pure blue. Nothing can be so blue as a blue sky with a little pink and yellow in it.

I was very much struck at Antwerp with a beautiful blue gown in a picture by Quentin Matsys. I thought it was the most vivid, beautiful blue gown I had ever seen. And when I examined it closely I found that there were little touches of yellow and pink all through it. Quentin Matsys was a blacksmith, before he became a painter, who had been educated to see only form, but he had such a naturally sensitive eye for color that he saw pink and yellow in the most intensely blue gown I had ever seen. I said, "What makes that so blue?" and I went up and saw these colors so soft and tiny, so delicately painted in that you did not find them at first. But when you looked for them they were there.

It must not be supposed that Monet is a man who can only admire his own style of work. When he learned that I was going to Holland, he said that he would give a good deal to see the Franz Hals again. He can draw beautifully. He told me that he should be glad sometime if I could paint a mouth under an eye instead of under a nose. Then he would know that I was getting a naïve impression. He thinks that an eye or a nose is of no more importance than a leaf on a tree. I think, however, that, constituted as we are, we should be more troubled by an eye or nose out of place than by a misplaced leaf. We do not know always where the leaf should be, but we do know where the eye or nose belongs.